

REPORT ON DECEMBER MEETING

Father Patrick Faherty: St Francis Xavier's Cathedral.

We enjoyed Father Faherty's delightful trave of Irish brogue as he entertained us with his address on St Francis Xavier's Cathedral.

Begun in 1840, the original church was opened in December 1849, although still not quite complete. Fr Faherty gave details of the various additions that have been made over the years. The trigger for this topic was the renovation in 1999 under the guidance of local architect and renovation expert, Andrew Conacher.

Father Faherty outlined the history of the early years of the Catholic Church in Wollongong, including the first recorded Mass by Fr John Therry at the Soldiers' Barracks in April 1833; the first school in 1837; and the first priest assigned to Wollongong, the legendary Fr John Rigney, in July 1838.

About the 1838 the first schoolhouse/church was erected, on the site of the first stockyard in Illawarra. A depiction of this building may be seen in John Rae's panorama of 1851 which is on display in our Museum. Fr Rigney served in Wollongong until transferred in 1845.

A strong feature of the Church's work under Bishop Polding and Fr Rigney was their enlightened treatment of the Aboriginal population in the area.

Another feature of Fr Faherty's talk was the display of several very old and important record books and a beautifully illustrated missal from these early years.

One page of a four-page pamphlet headed SOME SIGNIFICANT EVENTS AND DISTINGUISHED VISITORS is included in this Bulletin.

F. Osborne